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ABSTRACT

The speech communication unit of the Department of Communications at the University of South Carolina at Aiken uses an exit interview to obtain students' evaluations of their educational experiences, to assess students' understanding of core concepts, and to evaluate the quality of students' communication skills. The three-member speech communication faculty provide instruction for those students who have a speech communication concentration in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies Program. Students are interviewed by any of the speech communication faculty or the Director of Assessment using an interview schedule. Interviewers assess the communication skills of the interviewees in six predetermined competencies. Faculty analyze the results after any references which would identify the student are omitted. The information obtained has been very detailed and usable and has helped the faculty to make specific improvements in course objectives, course offerings and rotations, and in the assessment instrument itself. The senior exit interview is attached. (RS)

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A MULTI-PURPOSE SENIOR EXIT INTERVIEW TO ASSESS PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

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A PAPER PRESENTED BY:

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A MULTI-PURPOSE SENIOR EXIT INTERVIEW TO ASSESS PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA AT AIKEN
SPEECH COMMUNICATION

Various colleges and universities across the country are implementing assessment efforts to address issues of program quality and effectiveness. Such efforts must identify program strengths (so they can be kept strong) as well as weaknesses (so they can be corrected). In addition, the efforts must meet unit needs while fitting within budgetary, personnel and curricular constraints. Smaller programs in particular may be unable to implement capstone courses or use external examiners, yet students are an available and helpful source of information, and exit interviews are one good method for involving students. In this paper, we outline our use of a multi-purpose exit interview which is designed to meet three distinct purposes, as outlined below.

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM

Speech Communication is a unit in the Department of Communications and is supported by three full-time faculty. USCA has a Speech Communication concentration in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies Program and not a bachelor's degree in Speech Communication. For assessment purposes, this distinction is not important since BIS concentrations are assessed with the same rigor as degree programs. The number of students annually enrolled in the Speech Communication concentration is approximately 22.

MISSION STATEMENT

Our primary mission is to provide our students with an understanding of communication theories, principles, functions and concepts and with a range of systematic communication experiences in order to help them develop effective speech communication and critical thinking skills.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Speech Communication faculty are to provide those students who have a Speech Communication Concentration in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies Program with the educational experiences which will allow them:

1. to understand the core theories, principles and concepts of interpersonal communication;

2. to understand the core theories, principles and concepts of public discourse;

3. to understand the contextual and cultural nature of human communication, and to demonstrate a sensitivity to cross-cultural and co-cultural differences in communicating;

4. to develop communication skills appropriate to a wide variety of situations and purposes. These skills would include:
   -using clear, accurate and appropriate language to articulate ideas,
   -organizing messages logically,
   -using appropriate evidence and sound reasoning to support ideas,
   -listening attentively and critically,
   -recognizing and making use of feedback from others,
   -using appropriate nonverbal cues and being sensitive to the nonverbal cues of others, and
   -noting and adapting to the communication environment.

5. to avoid and/or manage communication problems and challenges;

6. to work effectively as a member of a group or team;

7. to analyze and critically evaluate the communication behaviors of self and others.

ASSESSMENT PURPOSE

Senior exit interviews are conducted for the following three purposes:

1. to obtain the students' evaluations on the quality of their educational experiences in speech communication.

2. to assess the students' understanding of core concepts and principles of communication by asking subject matter questions and rating responses to those answers on anchored rating scales.

3. to evaluate the quality of the students' communication skills as exhibited in the exit interview on a rating scale developed for this purpose.

EXPECTED RESULTS

In order to consider our program efforts successful, faculty have established the following standards:

1. The average of the student evaluations of the quality of the concentration should be at least a 4.0 on a 6-point scale.

2. The average of the faculty evaluation of the students' knowledge on the subject matter questions should be at least a 4.0 on a 6-point scale.

3. The average of the faculty evaluation of the students' skill demonstrated in the exit interviews should be at least a 4.0 on a 6-point scale.

ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

Before the Interview

- Faculty send all graduating seniors with a Speech Communication concentration a letter explaining the exit interview requirement. The letter also stresses that responses will be anonymous, will be used to improve the program and will not affect academic record.

- All graduating seniors sign up for interviews with the interviewer of their choice:
  - any of three Speech Communication faculty
  - the USCA Director of Assessment.

- Interviews are best conducted after exams and before graduation.

During the Interview

- Faculty/staff conduct each interview and make notes of the students' responses. Interviewers follow the attached interview schedule, asking each question in the order indicated.

After the Interview

- Interviewers assess the communication skills of the interviewees on six predetermined competencies. (See Part III of the attached interview schedule.)

- Interviewers submit their notes of students' responses to an administrative assistant who types, collates and distributes them. Any references which would identify a student are omitted.

- Speech Communication faculty individually rate the responses to the subject matter questions following an established criteria. (See Part II of the attached interview.)

- Faculty meet to assess the reliability of ratings to subject matter questions.

- Faculty analyze the results, discuss as a group what it reveals about the quality of the program, and decide how best to use the information obtained.

REASONS THIS APPROACH WORKS FOR US

Using this multi-purpose assessment method, we are able to obtain in one setting information about (1) students' perception of the program, (2) their understanding of core communication concepts, and (3) the quality of their communication skills as used in the interview. The information we have obtained has been very detailed and usable and has helped us to make specific improvements in course objectives, course offerings and rotations, and in the assessment instrument itself.

Since we have limited money, time and clerical support, we needed an approach that was cost-effective. We have found this approach to be affordable and well worth the time spent in the interviews. Although each interview takes approximately forty-five minutes to one hour, the interviews are manageable for us because we have a small student/faculty ratio.

We also have good working relationships with our students: Students choose their interviewers, helping ensure that they feel free to answer questions openly and honestly. Students have also been given the opportunity to comment on the exit interview itself, and comments have been positive. All students have reported that they would rather participate in a face-to-face interview than complete a written survey.

One additional reason this approach works for us is that all department faculty are actively involved in all phases of the assessment process. We have a high degree of trust among faculty, and all members have accepted and taken ownership of the results. This assessment method has resulted in all the faculty working together enthusiastically to evaluate the effectiveness of our efforts, to improve our assessment method, and to use the results of the outcomes assessment.

In conclusion, we recommend this approach to others whose situation is similar to ours. While no assessment method is perfect, this method has several advantages and has worked well for us. It has provided us with a mechanism for helping to assure that we are effectively fulfilling our mission to provide a high quality education and for obtaining specific information which has been used to strengthen our program.

Senior Exit Interview

For BIS Students

With a Speech Communication Concentration

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Senior Exit Interview
For BIS Students
With a Speech Communication Concentration

Interview Opening

As part of our effort to assess the strengths and weaknesses of our program, we are conducting interviews with all of our graduating seniors to find out how they evaluate the quality of their educational experiences in the Speech Communication program.

Your responses will be used only for program improvement, and will in no way affect your academic record. The information you give will be recorded on this form, but your name will **not** be attached anywhere to the form, and your responses will be combined with the responses of the other seniors we are interviewing to protect your anonymity. **Nowhere** will your name be attached to any comment you make, and I promise I will keep your individual responses confidential.

So, again, the information you give is for program improvement, and it is very important that you answer with complete honesty. We'd like you to give examples or other explanations to clarify your answers so we really understand how you see the quality of your experiences here at USCA.

Part I: Perceptions of Program Quality

The first areas we would like to discuss have to do with your educational experiences in specific areas of speech communication. For each of the following, please indicate how well prepared you feel now at the end of your college program.

Using the scale on this card *[HAND CARD]:*

6 = Extremely well prepared
5 = Very well prepared
4 = Somewhat prepared
3 = Uncertain
2 = Somewhat unprepared
1 = Very unprepared
0 = Extremely unprepared

Please consider **all** of the speech courses you've taken, and tell us how well you've been prepared in the following areas. After rating each area, I will also ask you to explain your rating so we can understand what went well and what didn't go so well. Remember, we are asking about broad areas rather than specific courses.

Part I: Perceptions of Program Quality

How well have you been prepared by all of your courses....

1.1 to analyze and evaluate your own communication behaviors with an eye toward self improvement? _____ Because

1.2 to understand the principles of interpersonal communication? _____
And you give that rating because:

1.3 to apply the principles of interpersonal communication to any communication problems and challenges you might face? _____ And please explain why you give that rating.

1.4 to work effectively as a member of a team or small work group? _____ Because:

1.5 to understand and apply the principles of effective public communication? _____
Because:

1.6 to analyze, evaluate and think critically about the claims and arguments made by others? _____ Because

1.7 to demonstrate a sensitivity to cross-cultural communication issues? _____
Because

Part I: Perceptions of Program Quality, continued

Now we would like to look at some of the elements of your experiences here as a student with a concentration in speech communication.

Using the scale on this card *[HAND CARD]:*

6 = Excellent
5 = Very Good
4 = Good
3 = Fair
2 = Poor
1 = Very Poor
0 = No basis to judge

Please rate each aspect of the speech communication program, and, if you'd like, give us a brief explanation of the primary reason for your evaluation.

[To next page]

Part I: Perceptions of Program Quality, continued

2.1 The availability of course offerings in Speech Communication. _____
And did you want to say anything about that rating?

2.2 The extent to which class objectives were specified and met in your speech communication classes? _____ *[Give time to elaborate]*

2.3 The overall quality of the instructional strategies used in the classroom, including lectures, discussions, and experiential exercises? _____ *[Give time to elaborate]*

2.4 The learning value of the assignments in your speech communication classes. _____
[Give time to elaborate]

2.5 The overall fairness of grading in your speech communication classes. _____
And did you want to say anything about that rating?

2.6 The overall quality of the courses you took in speech communication. _____
[Give time to elaborate]

2.7 What have you heard other students say about our speech classes that you think we should know?

Part I: Perceptions of Program Quality, continued

Using that same scale, please rate the speech communication faculty's performance in a number of areas, and, if you'd like, tell us the primary reason for each rating. Speech faculty include Hochel, Stewart and Wilson, plus any part-time professor you had here for a speech class.

6 = Excellent
5 = Very Good
4 = Good
3 = Fair
2 = Poor
1 = Very Poor
0 = No basis to judge

3.1 The faculty's overall knowledge of the subject matter? _____ And did you want to say anything about that rating?

3.2 The faculty's overall course conduct, including preparation, organization, clarity, starting and stopping class on time, providing a clear syllabus, using time well, etc. _____
[Give time to elaborate]

3.3 Faculty treatment of students in the classroom? _____ *[Give time]*

3.4 Each faculty member's approachability? _____ *[Give time]*

3.5 Each faculty member's availability? _____ *[Give time]*

Part I: Perceptions of Program Quality, continued

3.6 Did you get any academic or career advisement from your speech communication professors? Yes No

If yes, how would you rate the quality of the advisement that you received? _____
Because:

If no, did you need to get more advice from your speech communication professors? Explain.

Let's look now at the big picture:

4.1 What do you see as the primary strengths of the speech communication program? Why?

4.2 What do you see as the primary weaknesses of the speech communication program? Why?

4.3 Is there anything else you'd like us to know about the speech communication program?

Part II: Competence in Subject Matter

Now we would like to turn to some specific content areas from your course work. The goal of this section is to assess how well **we** have covered some key issues. You are not being graded here, but we are grading ourselves, and the general results are shared with **our** evaluators. As a result, we'd like you to give specific and thorough answers to these last few questions.

5.1 Imagine that a business leader has come to you for advice. She has been asked by the Chamber of Commerce to make a presentation to several representatives of major industries that are considering relocating their production facilities and home offices to Aiken.

A) What suggestions would you give her regarding **PREPARING** for such a presentation? *[Probe as needed]*

- What research would you suggest she do in advance?
- What specific suggestions would you give the speaker about enhancing her credibility?
- What would you suggest about preparing the speech itself?
- What guidance might you offer about making the speech persuasive?

B) Once the speech is prepared, what suggestions would you give this business leader about **PRESENTING** the speech? *[Probe as needed]*

- What tips might you give to help her do well?
- What would you tell her to avoid?

[See evaluation criteria on next page.]

Rating scale for Question 5.1

6 = Excellent

- Very well-organized and well-reasoned response;
- discusses need to conduct research on Aiken & audience;
- discusses at least 2 strategies for analyzing the audience and gives sound reasons for choices;
- shows good knowledge of credibility and ways to enhance;
- uses reasonable examples to support claims;
- offers at least 3 specific strategies for effective delivery, such as using key word outline, being extemporaneous, being flexible, maintaining eye contact.

3.5 = Average

- Somewhat well-organized response;
- identifies need to do research and notes need to analyze the audience but doesn't go into detail;
- shows some knowledge of credibility issues and offers at least one means to enhance;
- provides acceptable examples in support of claims;
- offers at least one specific strategy for effective delivery.

1 = Poor

- Poorly organized response which exhibits weak reasoning;
- provides few specifics regarding background research;
- shows little or no concern for adapting to the audience;
- shows poor understanding of credibility and ways to build it;
- gives no examples or poor examples;
- oversimplified and vague strategies for delivery.

Part II: Competence in Subject Matter, continued

5.2 For this question, I am going to read you a hypothetical situation. After I read it to you, I will give you a copy of it and give you a moment to look at it and think about the situation.

> A person named Nancy is a sales agent with a large manufacturing company, and all sales agents receive a commission based on merchandise sold. The company requires agents to rotate or take turns helping new customers who come in. Nancy believes that Mark, another sales agent, does not follow the rotation and is taking orders that should be hers. When questioned by Nancy, Mark defended his actions by saying he knew the customers in question or had talked to them before so they were his customers. Nancy did not believe Mark, but she did not challenge him on his explanation, and the problem worsened. On two occasions, she tried again to confront him, and Mark accused her of being lazy and trying to take his customers. Both times, they ended up shouting at each other. Their everyday interactions are now "icy." Nancy is reluctant to go to the boss because Mark has such a good sales record and the boss seems to like him.

Assume that, because of your expertise in communication, you have been asked to analyze this situation and offer input.

A) First of all, what would you identify as the key causes of the problem?

Any other causes? *[Probe once as needed]*

B) Going back to the beginning, how would effective communicators have handled this situation?

Anything else? *[Ask as needed]*

C) You've talked about some things that SHOULD have been done early on, but communicators can't go back, and there is still a problem. What would you suggest be done <u>now</u> to manage the conflict? Offer specific strategies that might be used.

What else? *[Ask as needed]*

[See evaluation criteria on next page.]

Rating scale for Question 5.2

6 = Excellent

- Identifies 2 or more contributing factors, including BOTH of the following:
  - misperceptions, or
  - Nancy's behaviors/transactional nature of communication.
- Identifies 3 or more ways the situation could have been handled more effectively.
- MUST include a clear discussion of assertiveness and at least one specific strategy for avoiding defensiveness.
- Identifies 3 or more appropriate strategies for managing the situation interpersonally, such as win-win problem solving, assertiveness, bargaining, collaboration.

3.5 = Average

- Identifies AT LEAST ONE of the following as a key cause:
  - misperceptions, or
  - Nancy's behaviors/transactional nature of communication.
- Identifies at least 2 ways situation could have been handled more effectively, including EITHER:
  - assertiveness, or
  - strategies for avoiding defensiveness.
- Identifies at least 1 appropriate strategy for managing interpersonally; goes beyond taking the problem to the boss for mediation

1 = Poor

- Focuses only on organizational factors;
- tends to side with one person or the other or lay blame;
- offers vague or no discussion of perceptions or mutual influence;
- does not acknowledge need to be assertive or to avoid behaviors that encourage defensiveness;
- focuses on what not to do versus effective choices to engage in;
- jumps quickly to level of turning problems over to supervisor.

Part II: Competence in Subject Matter, continued

5.3 Imagine that, a few years from now, the company you work for has decided to transfer you to a foreign, non-Western culture.

A) Aside from the language barriers, what communication problems or challenges would you anticipate? *[Probe once]*

B) What specific things would you do to effectively manage these challenges? *[Probe once]*

[See evaluation criteria on next page.]

Rating scale for Question 5.3

6 = Excellent

- Gives well-organized response;
- offers at least 4 realistic communication problems to anticipate;
- offers at least 3 workable strategies for managing the problems;
- shows solid grounding in interpersonal principles as they relate to intercultural communication;
- reveals understanding of ethnocentrism.

3.5 = Average

- Offers 2 realistic communication problems;
- offers 2 realistic strategies for handling problems;
- reveals some knowledge of principles of effective cross-cultural communication.

1 = Poor

- Shows little awareness of nature of cross-cultural communication problems;
- offers no specific strategies for handling problems;
- demonstrates little recognition of the scope of intercultural communication principles.

Possible communication problems:

- ethnocentrism
- self concept
- perceptions (determined by differences in values, beliefs, attitudes, world view, religion, history, etc.)
- role differences (gender, race, age, class, etc.)
- language issues (e.g., idioms, translations)
- nonverbal variables (e.g., kinesics, proxemics, touch, smell, dress, appearance, silence, time)
- context (e.g., different expectations and rules)
- "hidden" rules and guidelines

Possible ways of handling:

- self monitor
- recognize ethnocentrism and stereotyping
- information gathering strategies (observing, doing research on the culture, asking questions of people of that culture or those who have lived in culture, self disclosure)
- develop empathy
- be tolerant of ambiguity
- encourage feedback
- be flexible
- seek commonalities

Interview Closing

Well, those are all the questions we have. What else would you like us to know about your experiences in the speech communication program?

What comments do you have regarding this interview?

All right then. On behalf of the speech communication faculty, I want to congratulate you on your successful completion of the program. We very much appreciate your helping us to improve the effectiveness of our program, and we wish you success in your future endeavors. Thank you again.

Senior Exit Interview
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USC-Aiken Department of Communication: A Multi-Purpose Senior Exit Interview to Assess Program Effectiveness

Part III: Ratings of Communication Skills

In the final component of the assessment, the interviewer evaluates the quality of the students' communication skills as exhibited in the exit interview. The six dimensions are assessed on a six point rating scale from unsatisfactory to excellent, as follows:

Rating Scale:

	Unsatisfactory 1	2	Satisfactory 3	4	5	Excellent 6
Competency One: Provides clear, appropriate and logical evidence and development to support answers given.						
Competency Two: Employs logical and easy-to-follow organization.						
Competency Three: Uses language that is accurate, appropriate and lucid.						
Competency Four: Uses physical behaviors that compliment and reinforce the verbal behaviors.						
Competency Five: Exhibits vocal characteristics that are fluent, expressive, easily heard, distinct and appropriate.						
Competency Six: Shows verbal and nonverbal evidence of active listening skills.						